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Idora neighborhood has big plans

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YOUNGSTOWN — The name Idora conjures up images of crowded midways and screaming roller coaster rides. But the South Side neighborhood was once a thriving residential area as well.

In an effort to reclaim some of that glory, a neighborhood revitalization plan will be reviewed Tuesday by the Board of Zoning Appeals and residents who helped to write it.

About 150 residents teamed with city planners and a team from The Ohio State University to come up with the 165-page plan. Karen Perkins of the city Planning Department, who was manager for the project, said officials were impressed by the number of people who took part.

"We were very pleased with the turnout," Perkins said.

The plan had two public sessions and took about eight months to devise. It touches on topics ranging from historical preservation and fighting blight to improving economic opportunities in the neighborhood.

If the Board of Zoning Appeals OKs the draft, City Council plans to approve it as well.

One goal of the plan is to have residents form a neighborhood association and have the association apply for nonprofit status, Perkins said.

The city would provide guidance, she said, but the residents would work on the changes on their own.

"Our main goal is to empower the residents to take control of the neighborhood," Perkins said. "It's very important they are active participants in the revitalization of this neighborhood."

Rick Ostheimer is a member of the neighborhood association and said he was glad to see a plan.

"I'm happy they singled this neighborhood out," he said.

Ostheimer said his favorite things about the draft are plans for historic designations for parts of the neighborhood, as well as plans for a park and traffic circle at Indianola Avenue.

The Rev. George Batchelor, another neighborhood resident, said he also likes the historic preservation ideas. He has lived in the neighborhood for 30 years and has seen many changes.

"We've seen so much up and down, and we need something that can pull everything together to make a positive," Batchelor said.

He said what impresses him is the different groups of people who came together to brainstorm for the greater good.

"Everybody came together under the same banner," Batchelor said.

Planners also are working on a draft plan for the Wick Neighborhood on the North Side. A plan has also been completed for the Garden District area near Mill Creek Park on the West Side. The goal is to have a comprehensive plan for each of the city's 29 neighborhoods.

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